

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism



MEDIA

Contents

3

Covid-19 and the Alt-Right Media Ecosystem
By Byron Clark.

6

Death Star PR: Is all corporate media propaganda?
Transcribed and abridged, from a podcast by Derek
Johnson and Ani White.

13

“Was the Russian Revolution a Carrier-Pigeon
Revolution?”: Digital media and communication in the
Victorian Socialists
By Ian Anderson.

16

Preserving Aotearoa/NZ’s radical literature
By Daphne Lawless, originally delivered as a talk to
Radical Aotearoa Digital Archive (RADAR).

Editorial

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 has underlined the importance of correct information.

But what sources can we trust? This question is taken up, in different ways, in the following pages. We address interrelated questions of corporate media, alt-rightism and fake news, digital media, and independent socialist media (unfortunately a solicited article on the undermining of public service broadcasting fell through, but for NZ analysis of this we recommend the work of Peter Thompson). Throughout the issue, we seek to critically place media in social context. We hope our work brings useful ideas to readers, or at least passes the time during hours of physical distancing.

I’ll keep this brief: solidarity, kia kaha.

Ani White

Quarterly magazine published by Fightback
ISSN: 1177-074, Vol. 7, No. 2, Issue 39

Co-ordinating Editor for this issue: Ani White

Editorial Board: Bronwen Beechey, Daphne
Lawless, Joe McClure, Harry Milne, Marika
Pratley, Ani White

Design/Layout: Izzy Joy

Contact us at:

<http://fightback.org.nz>

Post: PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland 1164, New Zealand

Email: fightback.australasia@gmail.com

Phone: +64 272209552 (Aotearoa/New Zealand); +61 4 345 39905 (Australia)

Subscriptions:

\$60 (AU/NZ) print

\$20 (AU/NZ) PDF/EPUB

Covid-19 and the Alt-Right Media Ecosystem

By Byron Clark

"A mainstream media article, written by an academic from Massey university who has not gulped down koolaid to fawn over the government? We are taken aback, greatly."

That was how the New Conservative Party (New Zealand) introduced an opinion piece by Steve Elers that was published on *Stuff*, New Zealand's largest news website, stating the country should have closed its borders in February. The fringe right-wing party, outside of parliament and polling around 1%, has spent the past year telling their Facebook followers- an audience comparable in size to the following of more mainstream political party pages- to distrust mainstream media and academia.

"Time to get rid of the China virus that's infected our government. #chinaliedpeopledied", comments one of their followers, a man with a profile picture proudly declaring his support for the party. Another man comments with a link to a YouTube video claiming that telecommunications workers destroyed a cellphone tower to warn the public about 5G. "5g being set up during LockDown!!!! I do not consent to radiation", comments a woman with a "top fan" badge. "UN agenda 21 can only be implemented in a climate of fear", states another follower.

While some comments are supportive of the government's decision to place New Zealand on lockdown, closing all but essential services and banning gatherings of people in an attempt to stop the spread of Covid-19, the above comments are not atypical. For some followers, the New Conservative praise for Steve Elers isn't convincing: "If you take a closer look at this guy, he is an Alt left Maori activist."

Posting a link to an *RNZ* article about coming job losses at *NZME*, *Stuff's* major rival and owners of the *New Zealand Herald*, a New Conservative follower comments "bye bye fake news." While a number of *NZME's* redundancies are occurring at *Radio Sport* which has ceased broadcasting as globally the pandemic puts a halt on sporting competitions, the email to staff from *NZME* Chief Executive Michael Boggs indicates a reduction in the number of news journalists is coming: "The ongoing decline in revenue caused by the impact of COVID-19 continues to be significant. This is uncharted territory,

and no one knows when that will change.

"We must now make changes to the scope and scale of our business and do so quickly. This will inevitably result in job losses."

The pandemic is speeding up the decline of professional journalism, already well underway in New Zealand as elsewhere. Traditional media have struggled to maintain advertising revenue, in particular due to the shift in advertising to Facebook, which has become one of the primary platforms for the spread of misinformation.

In March, *Wired* published an article headlined Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories Are a Public Health Hazard "Anti-vaxxers think the virus is an effort to force vaccines on them, possibly orchestrated by Bill Gates. Others blame 5G networks", writes *Wired's* Emma Grey Ellis, showing that linking the virus with 5G conspiracy theories is not unique to the supporters of a fringe right-wing party in New Zealand. In the UK people influenced by conspiracy theories claiming symptoms of Covid-19 are actually caused by 5G mobile towers have abused technicians and even destroyed telecommunications infrastructure.

There has also been a documented increase in racist incidents against Asians and Chinese in particular in a number of countries, including New Zealand and Australia. In February, before New Zealand had any confirmed cases of Covid-19, parents of children at a Canterbury school received an email stating "our Kiwi kids don't want to be in the same class with your disgusting virus spreaders". In Western Australia, shoppers who appeared Asian were removed from a supermarket, and in Tasmania a student from Hong Kong was assaulted by a man who first shouted "you've got the virus" and "go back to your country". Notably these incidents occurred after headlines like "China Virus Panda-monium" and "China kids stay home" appeared in mainstream Australian newspapers in January. Politicians and pundits have continued to racialise the virus with terms like "China virus" "Wuhan virus" and "kung-flu", the latter appearing in the title of an Australian alt-right podcast episode in February.

While new Facebook pages have emerged to take advan-

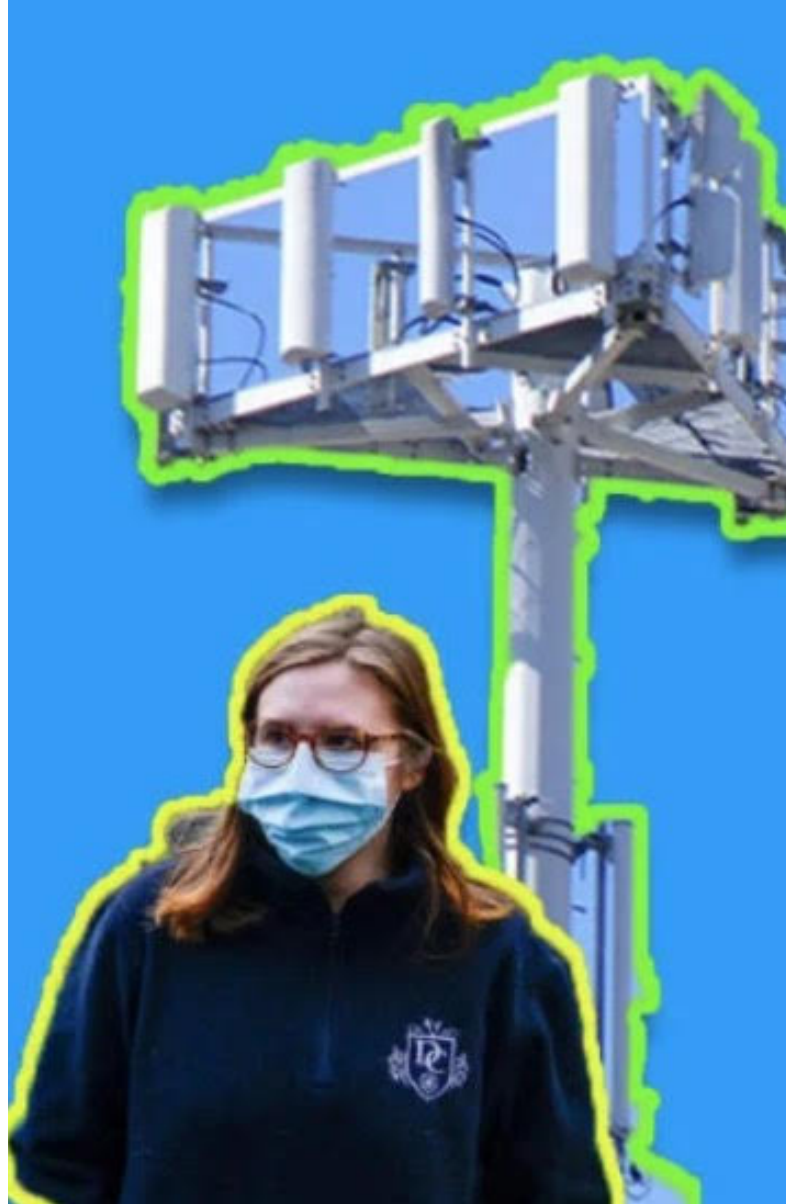
tage of growing Sinophobia, other far-right pages have used the pandemic to spread false information about their usual targeted groups. A page primarily Islamophobic in nature has repeatedly claimed Muslims “were the first to bring the plague to NZ from Iraq” possibly confusing Iraq with Iran, where an infected New Zealand citizen returned from (notably neither the ethnicity or religion of this woman is publically known).

Another post on the same page claims a private jet owned by a Saudi billionaire, which landed at Christchurch airport to repatriate Saudi citizens, was there to bring COVID-19 “to the hookers and street workers of Christchurch” adding “No one else can travel to NZ, except Jacinda’s wealthy handlers”. One commenter suggested the plane was there to pick up the Christchurch shooter, who according to a baseless conspiracy theory pushed by the tiny One Nation NZ party was not part of the far-right, but actually a Muslim convert. One Nation NZ stood in a by-election in 2018, but otherwise barely existed beyond Facebook page- which has since been removed for violating policy of hate speech and graphic violence.

“All over the world, from Iraq to the United States, people have been spreading anti-Semitic memes and messages suggesting that Jews, or Jewish stand-ins like George Soros, the Rothschilds, and Israel, are to blame for the outbreak” writes Ellis in *Wired*. “In the internet’s darkest corners, the scapegoating is being used to stir a movement that is less conspiracy theory than actual conspiracy”.

According to Oren Segel, vice president of the Anti-Defamation League’s Center on Extremism, white supremacists have discussed deliberately infecting ethnic minorities and exploiting tensions between ethnic groups to hasten “the boogaloo” an alt-right slang for race war. In the USA the FBI stopped a man who was planning to bomb a Missouri hospital treating COVID-19 patients. *NBC News* reported that he had done so to further the goals of his white supremacist ideology, and had told an undercover FBI agent he had chosen a hospital as a target due to “the increased impact given the media attention on the health sector”.

In Australia, the far-right have used the government’s Covid-19 response to stoke distrust in state institutions and encouraged mobilisation and violent action as a response to the crisis, according to Sydney based think tank The Lowy Institute. In the lead up to the first anniversary of the Christchurch shooting, Australian



[Image credit: The Tab]

counter-terrorism police in New South Wales arrested a 21-year-old man for an alleged terrorist plot. The man had allegedly tried to buy military equipment and firearms and was planning to blow up an electricity substation.

“The situation is ripe for exploitation by the far right,” Cynthia Miller-Idriss, American University sociologist and expert on the far-right, told *Al Jazeera*. “The uncertainty the pandemic creates creates fertile ground for claims about the need for change or the solutions the far right purports to offer.”

This is certainly evident in recent Facebook posts from New Zealand’s alt-right adjacent New Conservative Party, such as a picture of laughing women captioned “when someone who wants open borders sounds worried about the coronavirus spreading” and a screenshot of a *BBC* headline about the EU closing borders to non-citizens with the comment “so nationalism is back and borders are good?” (This rhetoric ignores the fact that the borders of Europe were far from “open” prior to the



5G is poisoning us all!!!!

What is this 5G conspiracy????



Keri Hilson ✓
@KeriHilson

People have been trying to warn us about 5G for YEARS.

pandemic- last year, over a thousand migrants drowned attempting to enter Europe on their southern sea border).

But New Conservative are, relatively speaking, moderates. On a page run by a Christchurch based man who in the months following the Christchurch shooting threatened to “destroy mosque after mosque until they take me out” an article from a known fake news website, alleging that France is not subjecting predominantly immigrant neighbourhoods to quarantine is shared with the comment “r@pe and sickness are just a part of the rich diversity pill we are all going to have to swallow.” (The @ replacing the a is likely an attempt to avoid Facebook algorithms removing the post).

Misinformation and conspiracy theories can move quickly from the far-right fringes to more mainstream social media with larger audiences. In April *Buzzfeed* reported that numerous lifestyle and parenting influencers on Instagram were “seamlessly weaving in evidence-free far-right conspiracy theories that are usually found in the significantly less Instagrammable parts of the inter-

net, such as 4 and 8-chan, in between their usual idyllic family snaps”.

With millions of people confined to their homes there is also concern that more people will be susceptible to the kind of online rabbit holes that lead people to the far-right. Mak Kapetanovic, a young man who had previously been influenced by alt-right narratives encountered on 4chan and has since left the right, told *Time* of his concerns that the pandemic could lead people down the same path. “Feelings of isolation, anger, grief and frustration, all of those things are happening. A lot of people are scared, and people are not sure what to think.

“It is the far right who always seem to take advantage of these insecurities.”

Death Star PR: Is all corporate media propaganda?

*This is an abridged transcription from an episode of the politics and pop-culture podcast
Where's My Jetpack: jetpack.zoob.net.*

The episode was originally released on the 19th of August, 2019.

Transcribed by TripleA Transcription, with corrections and abridgement by Ani White.

Ani:

Kia ora comrades, welcome to *Where's My Jetpack*, a politics and pop culture podcast with sci-fi and socialist leanings. I'm Ani White and we're on the line to my unfairly hot cohost Derek Johnson.

Derek:

Thanks, Ani. This week we're discussing the topic "Death Star PR: Is all corporate media propaganda?" We'll be discussing the Herman and Chomsky propaganda model in corporate media. So first I'll be introducing the propaganda model and then Ani will address some limitations to the model. According to Chomsky, media operate through five filters: ownership, advertising, the media elite, flak, and the common enemy.

So what is meant under **ownership**, which is the first filter, is that mass media firms, which are big corporations, often they are part of even bigger corporations. and their endgame is profit. And so it's in their interest to push for whatever guarantees that profit. And naturally critical journalism must take second place to the needs and interests of said corporations.

The second filter is **advertising**, and it exposes the real role of advertising. Media costs a lot more than consumers will ever pay, so advertisers fill the gap. So naturally what are advertisers paying for audiences and so it isn't so much that the media are selling your product, their output, they are also selling advertisers a product: namely, you.

The third filter is [the **media elite**], the establishment manages the media through this filter. Journalism cannot be a check on power because the very system encourages complicity. Governments, corporations, big institutions know how to play the media game. They know how to influence the news narrative. They feed media scoops official accounts interviews with "experts" and they make themselves crucial to the process of journalism. So those in power and those who report on them are in bed with each other.

So after the media elite we have **flak**. If you want to challenge power you'll be pushed to the margins. When the media, journalists, whistleblowers, sources stray away from the consensus they get what is known as flak. This is the fourth filter. When the story is inconvenient to the powers that be you'll see the flak machine in action

discrediting sources, trashing stories, and diverting the conversation.

To manufacture consent you need an enemy, a target. That **common enemy** is the fifth filter. Communism, socialism, terrorists, immigrants, Muslims at this point are common enemy, a boogiemana to fear, helps corral public opinion.

Ani:

Yeah. So I find that model is quite useful in a number of ways. It describes a number of mechanisms that do take place absolutely in corporate news media. But I do think it has some limitations, some tensions, and to illustrate one of those tensions [you have a show like *The Simpsons*]... the entertainment arm [Fox Entertainment] was directly mocking and attacking the politics of the news arm [Fox News]. And the propaganda model was primarily developed for news, so particularly if you're going to apply it to non-news media, like fiction media, propaganda implies that people are consciously setting out to promote an ideology. It doesn't just mean that there's ideology, it means that they're consciously setting out to promote it. And for example, I don't think that the producers of *Dumb and Dumber* had any particular ideology that they wish to promote. I think they want to make money. It's certainly not in any way subversive. My point is that the primary purpose of corporate media is making money. You can get subversive messages through because they can still make money... [with *The Simpsons*] the writers were surprised at how little interference they got. For example, the Frank Grimes episode or the episode with the strike action, they didn't get interference. And that makes sense because why would the producers care, if they are making millions of dollars, if somebody on a TV show said something mean about them. So the primary purpose isn't to convince people of the greatness of capitalism, it's to make money. So that does mean some of the subversive messages can get through, but only to the extent that they're profitable and also only to the extent that people don't act on them. So with the example of the strike episode in *The Simpsons*... it relatively sympathetically depicts the strike action, like it kind of makes fun of the union but in general it is sympathetic. But if the writers go on strike, Fox isn't exactly a fan of that. So [the] concept of repressive

tolerance is useful to me, which means that basically in theory you can say anything, which includes sort of racist and oppressive things as well, but in terms of radical ideas, you can't act on those ideas. And I think that's important because that's a different mode of power from purely propaganda. It's still a power structure and a class structure, but it's not always simply propaganda. It is just a more sophisticated mode of power. And the propaganda model points out some mechanisms that do occur but it's not a complete theory of ideology, or a complete theory of media...

I think Fox News is kind of a paradigmatic example of the propaganda model. At Fox News you can constantly see all of these filters really clearly and obviously in the evidence. The constant construction of enemies, constant flak, the flak that socialists will get for example. But one thing to consider there is that Fox News is barely considered news. It is a good example in the sense that there's a large enough audience that thinks of it as news, that it still socially functions as news, but for example in Canada [Fox News] shows are run with a disclaimer that they're not actually news shows. So there's a certain standard of journalism that's expected even in bourgeois and corporate journalism which Fox doesn't meet. So that's a caveat, that lying is not generally considered a good practice... it does absolutely happen. I mean, the Iraq War example, even though it occurred well after the propaganda model was developed, it's actually another paradigmatic example of the propaganda model where basically the press and particularly in the US just directly reproduced lies, and did not in any way investigate or criticize them.

[But] my problem is that people don't distinguish very well, so people will basically argue that the coverage of Syria is exactly analogous to the coverage of Iraq in 2003, and I don't think that's true. There have really been no obvious lies on the level of, for example, Saddam Hussein's links to Al-Qaeda, which was a bizarre nonsense and it was really obviously bizarre nonsense at the time to be honest. Whereas in the case of Syria it is true that Assad is flattening neighborhoods. That's not just something Obama came up with. You can say... that certain things will be emphasized, it's not necessarily that the press lies, but they will report on things that they consider important, and ignore things they don't consider important, and that's always a necessary process in any kind of coverage. There will be some kind of filtering but it doesn't mean it's lies. And there's this populist mood out there that if you post something from any source that isn't *Russia Today* people will say, "Well, that's just propaganda." And it's this kind of populist kind of radical skepticism that is actually really edging into just anti-science conspiracy theory.

Derek:

Yeah. It's very anti-vaxxer, very QAnon territory. Yeah.

Ani:

Yeah. You can't just learn from things that confirm your

preconceptions, because actually in that case you're not learning at all. You need to be willing to look at a source and say, "Okay, I don't actually agree with the editorial line of the source. My politics are not in line with those of New York Times or the Washington Post but I can't really learn about the world without engaging with the work of people who I disagree with. And I certainly can't learn about the world by denying all sources that aren't my particular variety of communist." And that's not necessarily what Chomsky and Herman are arguing for but it is a populist mood, that their argument if put forward in a non-nuanced way could play into.

Derek:

...[W]e've kind of gone from a period where we had independent media and the Indymedia media period of the late '90s early aughts, that collapsed because of lack of funding, lack of money, and in some places like in Germany and on the West Coast here the FBI raided the info shops and Indymedia in Seattle and other places. And in this vacuum conspiracy theorists, people with various ideologies and motives whether it's pro-Russia, pro-Putin, pro-this or that, or campists, or fascists, or whoever, they've come in, they've used this realistic skepticism you should have of the mainstream capitalist media and they've made it, flattened it so that you have skepticism of *everything*. And then when you're told something true by CNN or BBC or the *New York Times* or whoever, now all of a sudden you treat that as a conspiracy and propaganda, and you don't believe anything. But now conspiracy theorists treat it with the same level of seriousness as facts and science and news. And it's not coincidental, we've seen how this model was played out in Russia, and under other authoritarian regimes, of pushing this idea that there is no truth to be gained from the media and that it's all lies, it's all fake news and that you can't trust reality at any point. And this is an engineered process and we kind of see where this metastasizes by the time you get to Trump's supporters and QAnon people, and people who will just not believe any true things that they hear, and just treat it all as lies and propaganda. And you're seeing how the Trump administration has weaponised that thinking. We've seen how it's been used to discredit even independent media, at this point, *Real News*, *Democracy Now!*, all of these independent sources have been completely discredited for not having enough scrutiny. *CounterVortex* has written about this very well. Eric Draitser has written about it very well over at *CounterPunch*. Even though *CounterPunch* I would say has some problems as well but...

Ani:

Yeah, definitely. They do have some good material though.

Derek:

I know Daphne Lawless has written about this very well. Alexander Reid Ross has written about this very well, and there's been studies over at University of Washington,

about how there is this ecosystem of independent blogs and news sources and pages, that have a lot of connections to a lot of right wing politics, and a lot of conspiracy theories, and ties to either the Russian government or whoever. And we've seen how right wing state propaganda from Russia and other countries goes through that filter, to the left and then you see people on the Green Party, and liberals and others, parroting the same stuff you hear people on the right.. when it comes to either Syria or Assad.

Ani:

Yeah... A lot of people who wouldn't buy into flat Earthism, or antivaxx, but then buy into things with the same level of rigour regarding Syria. So a good example would be Chris Trotter who's New Zealand's most prominent supposedly left commentator, on New Zealand's most prominent left blog, *The Daily Blog*, saying that the CIA was arming the rebels in 2011, which is nonsense because it wasn't an armed struggle in 2011, let alone one armed by the CIA, and the CIA didn't get involved until about 2013, 2014. Now, that can just pass by, nobody cares. It's a complete and utter fabrication, but a lot of people are perfectly comfortable with that because it's Syria.

Derek:

Yeah. And I would also say people are turning it around now and they're saying "don't trust CNN, don't trust MSNBC, or the New York Times, or whoever because they're owned by corporations but it's okay to listen to state-owned media when they're owned by dictatorships." Because it took so long to get people to have a more radical view of the news media, and then go from that to then everybody can have a blog and there's independent media sources, that maybe aren't under the same control of the news networks, or don't have the same biases. For instance, Israel. The whole Israeli-Palestinian subject shackles all of our media. I mean, you can get something like *Democracy Now!* or *Real News* or somebody or *The Nation*, or somebody to be really honest about that subject, in ways that the rest of our media cannot be.

Ani:

Yeah. Those mechanisms are real. I mean, a great example is that backlash against, Trump's called them 'The Squad' [US Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib], the flak against 'The Squad', is a perfect example of-

Derek:

The four congresswomen. Yes.

Ani:

Not being a Democrat at all I can't help but feel a lot of sympathy for them. Politically, I'm feeling very conflicted, because I like them so much. Point being, they're getting

flak. They are also an example of the common enemy, so these mechanisms are occurring on ongoing basis.

Derek:

Oh yeah. It's being done on a fascist level, yeah. Attacking them as being un-American for their race. We have a fascist president in this country, who's going to run on open white supremacy. And now we're seeing how Ted Cruz and another senator tried to put up a motion in the senate to have Antifa recognized as a domestic terrorist organization...

Ani:

Yeah. And I mean, the question of the complicity of the media there is interesting, because obviously Fox is fully onboard with it.

Derek:

Well they gave him free media time to run for president. He got billions of dollars' worth free media time to run for president because they thought it was a lark, and they thought it was cute that this racist billionaire was running for president.

Ani:

Yeah, and there's the thing. It's the liberal sources that enable him in a way. So at the time, 2016, I was actually running a class on News Media and actually a surprising amount of people in my class were saying that they viewed the press as biased against Trump. And I gave an example from, it was MSNBC, which was about the coverage of the disruption of a Trump rally, and I pointed out the chronology of their reportage, and what I pointed out is that you heard from Trump first and often, and his supporters first and often, and it wasn't until maybe the next day that they actually interviewed one of the organisers of the disruption. So I don't think MSNBC, I don't think that was because they're consciously sympathetic to Trump. It's a matter of what you could call source dependency. Trump was the official source. Some random, probably communist, community organiser is not an official source. So Trump says these sensationalist things, which are news-worthy, and so a press can enable that, without necessarily being politically sympathetic to Trump.

Derek:

And they don't understand how fascists function, and that a fascist will say and do anything, and contradict themselves and lie at any moment...

Ani:

Yeah. And I do suspect that while Fox will very openly and happily jump on this opportunity, the issue of liberals, people like Rachel Maddow, MSNBC, CNN, that kind of area, they will play into the civility narrative.

Derek:

Respectability politics etc.

Ani:

Yeah. So if this idea of criminalising Antifa is not just a passing brain fart, and we can hope it's just a passing brain fart. If it isn't then they may well enable it.

Derek:

Well, the idea that all this violence was happening, and all these people were being violently attacked and stabbed and shot, but the second milkshakes were thrown, all of a sudden there was attention? That speaks to something.

Ani:

So, I just wanted to move on to another point about limitations of the propaganda model. Which that it doesn't really address, and it doesn't even seek to address, the question of whether propaganda works, whether people are essentially brainwashed. An example being the popularity of socialism among millennials, a generation that's been raised in a thoroughly antisocialist ideological environment. So in Media Studies there was kind of a move away from emphasis on propaganda. Mostly because of a look at audiences, and I guess the crucial thing about audiences is that they bring their own experiences and knowledge. So for example, me watching a Donald Trump rally, I already have my own kind of preconceptions, my own experience, my own reading that I'm bringing to this. And what audience study has tended to find is basically that, media isn't good at telling people what to think, but it's good at telling people what to think *about* or talk *about*. So for example, if Trump is in the news whether you're a communist, a fascist, a liberal, whether you think you're apolitical, you'll probably be thinking and talking about Trump. And you'll bring your own experiences and knowledge to bear in understanding what's happening with Trump, but you are likely to be influenced by what is being covered. It doesn't necessarily directly tell people what to think, kind of thing. And that is something I think we need to be somewhat resistant to... seek out things that maybe aren't being force-fed to you, share information. On the left in particular, we're internationalists, which means we need to be talking about things other than the US and the UK, so share information and seek out information. Point being, don't let the press set the agenda all the time, and that also means we need our own media to a certain degree, as well.

Derek:

Yeah. And that's what I was speaking to earlier is that we kind of were going in that direction and that movement stalled and failed and now the skeleton of Indymedia has now been taken over by negative forces, to be used to as propaganda against us. And I would say that, yeah, propaganda is about... reinforcing ideas or reinforcing confirmation bias. I think it's a misreading of

the function of propaganda, or how psychology works, to think that ideas are just deposited in human heads, and then people are brainwashed, because brainwashing technically does not exist as a concept, and it's more about persuasion. And even that, measuring the success of propaganda isn't necessarily based on, how successful were you at persuading X amount of people. I think it's just more about putting out your version of events as the official line, as the official story that drowns out other analysis. Cause like the best propaganda is telling the truth, but adding maybe one or two little lies in there. People often think that propaganda means it's automatically false, or that you're being told false things by the government, and that's obviously not the case.

Ani:

Yeah. Like it might just be a matter of quoting one person and not quoting another person. Your quoting of that person isn't a lie, but the fact that you chose to quote that person and not another person is obviously going to affect things. So it is a matter of what truth you choose to tell. And I agree, the propaganda model isn't discredited by the fact that audiences have the capacity for critical thought basically. But part of my point is, not necessarily that the model is wrong, but that on its own without some additional work it, can feed into some kind of populist ideas. We also can't completely disconnect the propaganda model from Herman and Chomsky's apologetics for certain regimes. I'm thinking of Chomsky's apologetics for the Pol Pot regime.

Derek:

Yeah. And there's also other criticisms of Chomsky's readings of events. The Srebrenica attack in Bosnia, and a lot of people have criticised him, his writing on that. And more recently was the gassings in two different towns in Syria, by the Assad regime, and that's when we saw a crossover from people being critical of what they hear, or thinking oh this is regime change propaganda, to full-on Sandy Hook trutherism, where suddenly people on the left were saying... human rights groups like the White Helmets were faking bombings, or they were faking the rescues and pulling people out rubble, it was all actors and sounding not dissimilar from Alex Jones. And Chomsky repeated, without question, Theodore Postol's writing on those attacks, and Postol was taken in by a propagandist for Russia, that I believe lives in Australia, "Syrian Girl" who was a Nazi-connected person.

Ani:

Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Derek:

And there was no critical assessment of that, because basically what happens is this critique becomes only about focusing on, how do these events reported implicate America.

Ani:

Exactly.

Derek:

Not where does the truth fall based on the information that comes out. And I find that very strange as somebody who, you really can't question me on my dispassion and hatred for this country, and any other nation state in this world, but I can see when things are actually not the fault of American imperialism, or the fault of America, and I would not stretch my analysis to blame things that have nothing to do with America to be America's fault. So I just find that strange, me personally, that people find themselves in that position, and it's kind of a Cold War mentality and a campist mentality.

Ani:

Yeah. I think not everything is about the US. The US also isn't the only evil in the world, and the official account also it isn't always wrong. I think 9-11 is a perfect example of that. I mean, again a lot of people who wouldn't buy into 9-11 Truth will buy into actually similar bullshit, but 9-11 is clearly a case where there are other evils in the world. And radical skepticism of the official account isn't always progressive. It can be very regressive in many ways.

Derek:

It could be hijacked for other purposes. And I would recommend as well Adam Curtis' documentary, the last one that he did.

Ani:

HyperNormalisation?

Derek:

Yes.

Ani:

I actually didn't like that.

Derek:

The last part he did there on Russia, which is very interesting because he's very doubtful of any of the connections between Trump and Russia. And he's a Russiagate skeptic, which is very strange given the part about Putin and Trump that he did in that documentary.

Ani:

Yeah. Which pretty much exactly about that strategy you're right.

Derek:

Yeah. The point I was going to make is that that propaganda strategy, described in *HyperNormalisation*, used by Alexander Dugin in Russia and other propagandists.

Basically the point is, it's not that they're trying to convince you with the propaganda, it's to overwhelm you with as much bullshit all at once, that you cannot accurately gauge what is reality. And when you cannot understand what's reality, how can you be an informed citizen in a liberal democracy? And that is the whole point, that Alexander Dugin was trying to do, because he's trying to radically undermine liberal democracy, because he's a fascist, neo-fascist, and this is very useful propaganda for any kind of administration, and any kind of regime, where you have this kind of reality management.

Ani:

So yeah, radical skepticism. It needs to be about, learning about the world... that means learning from things that we don't agree with. I mean, Karl Marx engaged a lot with bourgeois writers, and sometimes he was more supportive of things and bourgeois writing than he was of certain socialist arguments. So, particularly. I'm obviously thinking how his take on bourgeois political economy where, he found a lot of value in bourgeois political economy which other socialists hadn't. Now obviously he critiqued it, and turned it into something entirely new. I'm saying we should do our own independent analysis absolutely, but not just saying, "Well, that's *The Washington Post*. It's a bourgeois source so it's obviously lies. I don't even need to read it." Which is a very common attitude that I see around right now.

Derek:

Yeah. And I would say if you have that same skepticism, why don't you have that same skepticism about RT?

Ani:

Yeah, or any, CounterPunch, what's Greenwald's one? The Intercept.

Derek:

Yeah. They're pretty good in spite of him sometimes.

Ani:

Yeah. But there's this weird inconsistency, with for example Reality Winner, who was a whistleblower on Russiagate, who as far as I know is still in prison for that. She pointed out interference in the voting machines. So *The Intercept* ran that story, and it's been said that they basically let her go to the wall, I'm not clear on that, whether they did intentionally let her go to the wall, I honestly can't make a solid claim on that. But it's certainly the case she's been completely ignored.

Derek:

Yeah, that is 100% provable.

Ani:

Yeah. And so there's all these other whistleblowers who get endlessly romanticised. I mean, Assange who, yes,

I think WikiLeaks did some good work but Assange is a total scumbag, he gets so much attention and so much defence. And then you got Reality Winner who's in prison and people just...nobody's heard of her.

Derek:

But I would imagine too though the connection is... like you're saying is that the reason why Assange is still romanticized and why Reality Winner is ignored, is because she proved that there was Russian interference. And that goes against the popular narrative that has colonised a lot of the left in this country, to the point where we have a pro-Trump sector of the left, left media anyway, as exemplified by Greenwald and others. Where they're actively defending Trump's regime, and they're actively defending him against impeachment, and they've completely lied about the outcome of the Mueller Report, and have totally parroted Bill Barr's assessment. And now that that's been disproven, that he was lying, nobody's retracted on that, but all of those people, all of those writers, have demanded the head of Rachel Maddow, and anybody who reported on so-called Russiagate.

Ani:

And you've got Greenwald going on Fox News. Now if we're going to talk about propaganda, right wing propaganda, again Fox News is the paradigmatic example. And you've got Greenwald going on there to basically say, "Well, the deep state is conspiring against Trump." How can anyone on the left take him seriously at that point? To me, that's a complete capitulation. People can't conceive of, maybe learning something about Syria, but they'll support somebody who goes on Fox News to defend the president of the United States of America.

Derek:

...Nobody's copped to it. When it was proven that those chemical attacks in Syria were not done by the rebels, and it was not a rebel stronghold, holding chlorine gas or something, that got bombed by the heroic Assad regime. Nobody issued any take-backs. Nobody said, "Hey, we were wrong, it turns out Assad did do those chemical attacks."

Ani:

[Robert Fisk rightly criticised] journalists embedded in the Iraq War. who went around with US troops who would show them what they wanted to show them, he was right to say that but he's doing the same thing now with the Assad regime. His reportage on Syria is all guided by the Assad regime. He's an embedded journalist, and embedded journalist sounds very objective, but it's not because you're embedded with basically one group or another, and in his case he's embedded with regime forces. So when he speaks to some random guy who says, "Well, the chemical weapons attacks were faked," he's speaking to some random guy while on a regime tour, and then people will endlessly repost that article and ignore UN research.

Derek:

So does propaganda work? It's all over the place on that one. And as it's been pointed out, like if advertising didn't work they wouldn't spend billions of dollars on Madison Avenue.

Ani:

It's easier to get people to part with their money, than to get people to fully subscribe to a political party or what have you. I mean, that's the commonality of capitalist media, is that it's capitalist media.

Derek:

Yeah. And you know what's funny about that, was how the media warned us about Trump in popular culture. Like in *Back to the Future 2*, *Gremlins 2*, *Super Mario Brothers*, and even the unfilmed *Ghostbusters 3* had a villain based on Trump, and *Dinosaurs*.

Ani:

So there's certain amount of license artists have, particularly in comedy, particularly in satire, and particularly if it's profitable. And there was a quote from Joss Whedon, I know he's cancelled, but it's an interesting quote, about basically what it's like to work as a subversive artist in corporate media. Because, I would say shows like *Buffy* and *Dollhouse* and *Firefly* have dealt with some pretty interesting themes, considering again they were produced by Fox... This quote came during the production of *Dollhouse*, an interesting thing to note there is the production of *Dollhouse* was shut down for the writers' strike, and that Mutant Enemy, Joss Whedon's company, they ran a picket line so they were relatively a militant group, which interesting because some of them were libertarians. But anyway, this quote is kind of about dealing with subversive themes while being in a corporate media company.

Derek:

In his quote he said, "Have you been in America? I like to consider myself a documentarian. The entire structure is designed to mess with your minds, to combine selling you things with entertaining you, to keep you in line, to make you think that you need the things they want you to need, and to stay away from the things that they want to stay away from, to keep them in power, to share none of it. This is all happening. There are lights in the darkness. The art we get to create because our powerful patrons let us is one of them. But sometimes, yeah, it's like running the daycare on the Death Star."

Ani:

So, what is to be done? As I said, even where you can get subversive message into corporate media, it's still limited to its acquisition of exchange value. So put simply, if it doesn't make money it's cancelled, as Whedon discovered with *Firefly* and *Dollhouse*. So, for that reason



WHERE'S MY JETPACK
PRESENTS

DEATH STAR PR IS ALL CORPORATE MEDIA PROPAGANDA?

we need both publicly funded media, but also and for revolutionary leftists more importantly, our own independent media. Traditionally you have the papers, the newspapers, of the communist or socialist parties. Obviously now, we're moving into more of a digital age, there may be still some place for print, but in any case we need our own channels, as you said, Indymedia was one, and now we're seeing the rebirth of podcasts, the sort of second wave of podcasts on a somewhat meta note. So, podcasts are certainly a part of the infrastructure that is now being developed as a kind of alternative to mainstream corporate media. And despite my criticisms of an overly simplistic view of mainstream media, I do think it's important that we have our own media, and podcasts are a part of it.

Derek:

Yeah. I agree with that, and I'm very proud to be somebody who is part of both the original wave of podcasts, and now this current wave of podcasts, now everybody and their uncle, and standup comedians, and everybody have podcasts. And I think it's something to definitely uti-

lise for good. And we're definitely seeing, with the loss of net neutrality in this country, and some of the copyright laws being passed in the EU and etc., that we're seeing kind of this closing of the digital commons, putting to lie the libertarian and anarchist ideas of the freedom that the internet was going to bring, that is described in the California Ideology... We're really seeing how authoritarian and totalitarian Silicon Valley is, we're gonna have the ability to have our own alternative media, and have podcasts and everything, but we may not have the bandwidth, so we'll ironically might have to go back to radio and pamphlets and newspapers and zines.

Ani:

Well, I think we need multiple communication strategies.

“Was the Russian Revolution a Carrier-Pigeon Revolution?”: Digital media and communication in the Victorian Socialists

By Ian Anderson, RMIT Doctoral candidate in Media Studies.

This article was researched and written before the COVID-19 outbreak, which has affected the relationship between 'IRL' and online organising. Like many organisations, the VicSocialists have shifted towards online videoconferencing, for both public events and internal discussions.



The Victorian Socialists (VicSocialists) launched in 2018, as a coalition of three socialist groups. That year, the campaign ran a number of candidates for the Victorian parliamentary election – two of the candidates already held seats in local council. Former leading candidate Stephen Jolly explicitly cited recent international polarisation as a reason to attempt his parliamentary bid:

[My campaign is] the first time in Australia that the left is tapping into the anti establishment mood on a large scale... In America and Europe you've seen the rise of far right but also a new left with figures like Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders. In Australia, it's been unusual as it's just been the far right with Pauline Hanson and Cory Bernardi, who have tapped into that discontent.¹

The VicSocialists did not meet their goal of electing leading candidate Stephen Jolly to state parliament, but received the fourth largest vote after the Greens. In 2019, the campaign ran three candidates for the Federal Election – notably their prior leading candidate Jolly was not selected as the organisation was conducting an investigation for charges of abuse, and after the election he would be suspended over a separate abuse investigation² – yet they received over 4% in three electorates despite not running Jolly. This article is based on interviews with 13 members and supporters, as well as my own experiences.

¹ Armstrong, Liam. "Could Steve Jolly Be Australia's First Socialist Politician in 70 Years?" Vice, February 8 2018 (<https://tinyurl.com/yxvjpsak>). Web. Accessed 18/06/2018

E-skepticism of activists

I do think sometimes there's an overstatement about social media, like the Arab Revolutions, there were some people who want to refer to them as the Facebook revolutions, but I mean really was the Russian revolution the carrier pigeon revolution? People will find ways to communicate, and actually in that instance people had to find ways to communicate outside of the online forms because the government shut down the internet, and they still organised.³

This was the very last comment from interviewee Kath Larkin, a rail worker who at the time had just been pre-selected as the VicSocialists candidate for Cooper. Around 200 people attended the conference, held at the Maritime Union of Australia headquarters in South Melbourne.

Kath very much emphasised the value of face-to-face communication over the course of the interview, and considered the day-conference a success in bringing people together for democratic deliberation in person. Earlier in the interview Kath commented:

Obviously there's a lot that we do on social media, and I

² Jolly's behaviour was not denied by his political supporters, who were open about the process that has occurred so far. That said, conflicting claims circulate about the adequacy of this internal process, with many external to the organisation saying it was inadequate or even a cover-up. The first problem arose prior to the foundation of the VicSocialists, when Jolly was a member of another socialist organisation, simply called The Socialists. Jolly had sent some text messages that constituted sexual harassment. This was investigated by the organisation, with the resolution that Jolly was required to apologise and undergo counselling. Jolly resigned from that organisation, and would later approach another group proposing the Victorian Socialists electoral project. In the early stages of the VicSocialist project, during negotiations between a number of socialist organisations, a group of Socialist Alliance members opposed Jolly's nomination. When he was endorsed, those members resigned. Over the course of the Victorian Socialists state electoral campaign, claims emerged on social media that the prior process was not adequate, and that Stephen Jolly had engaged in other inappropriate behaviour. After the state election, the VicSocialists launched a second investigation into Jolly's behaviour, and he was not selected as a Federal Election candidate because that investigation was ongoing. At that point some former members rejoined because he had not been selected. Shortly after the Federal election, Stephen Jolly's membership was suspended as it turned out police were investigating another abuse claim. At this point, the situation finally entered into mainstream media coverage, after months of circulation on social media.

³ It may be worth noting here that her skepticism aligns with debates in academia about the techno-utopianism associated with 'Twitter revolutions' (Dumitru, 2012; Berenger, 2013; Musa & Willis 2014; Bebawi & Bossio, 2014; Kraidy, 2016).

think sometimes when you're in the left you can kind of feel like what you see in your Facebook wall is what everyone sees, but actually we know that's not true, we know that the way that Facebook is manipulated and run means that actually it's quite hard for leftists to get their views out there. I do think social media will still be important particularly for young leftists in the area, but there's also gonna be a need to get out to community events.

This is a common sentiment among Victorian Socialist activists. VicSocialists volunteer and librarian John Gao had this to say when explaining why he uses Twitter less than he used to:

I guess because I'm interested in politics, not just theoretical but to do stuff in practice, which requires face-to-face interaction, talking to the public in my own city, so therefore organising on a local level is very important, and the absence of that critical mass on Twitter, at least in that area was not as useful in some ways.

Another interviewee who preferred not to be named commented more bluntly that "Twitter is an actual toilet", and while less anti-Facebook stated that "I don't think we should overstate Facebook because a lot of it was the boots on the ground that did the work."

Activists' skepticism of the digital included three key aspects:

The digital divide, or uneven participation – Activists emphasised the importance of face-to-face communication in fostering constituencies that did not participate heavily in the digital sphere, particularly older working class voters.

Criticism of utopian techno-determinism - Connected to pride in organising capacities not determined by the affordances of media technologies. Arguably some techno-dystopianism centred on the commodification of the net.

Skepticism of 'call-out culture' and online criticism.

Despite these criticisms, there was little interest expressed in a programmatic decommodifying transformation of digital media. VicSocialist activists were simply more interested in other issues, such as migrant worker rights. The 2018 Election Manifesto did not mention digital rights, a strong focus in digital parties, coming closest to this in a reference to surveillance associated with the War on Terror.

...And yet

Yet digital media is strongly used for promotion. The VicSocialists Facebook page has over 5,000 likes at the time of writing. The page averaged 3 original posts a day during the week before the election in 2018, with posts routinely attracting hundreds of reactions, and regular video posts usually attracting thousands of views. This rate of posts and interactions is similar to the Australian Greens Facebook page over the same period, Australia's third largest party with a relatively significant youth base. VicSocialists also had a number of location-specific Facebook pages, a meme page, an Instagram and a Twitter. The point here is not so much the success of engagement

as the effort: despite the activists' stated lack of passion for digital media, there was clearly concerted work to ensure visibility across digital media. Crucially, this was a fairly centralised effort with consistent messaging across major corporate platforms., freeing most activists to engage in other kinds of work and keep their digital engagement to 'likes' and shares. There was no pretension here of digital media as a horizontal structure: it was merely a tool for promotion.

Additionally, the finding that the VicSocialists are skeptical of digital media, yet strongly use it to promote socialist ideas, is paralleled by a study on parallel electoral group the Democratic Socialists of America or DSA,⁴ a group which has grown to around 50,000 members after backing the Bernie Sanders campaign. This study found that platforms such as Facebook and Twitter served contradictory purposes of cohesion and fragmentation. Interview subjects found the culture on Twitter particularly alienating or even "repellent". This is a platform that "skew[s] young, male, well-educated" and tends to use in-joke humour to promote cohesion, and members expressed concern that this was alienating to those outside the in-group. As a "normative strategy", members argued for the use of collective social media pages for promoting socialist ideas, countering the tendency towards individualistic fragmentation. This is paralleled by the VicSocialists' strong use of centrally administrated pages on Twitter and Facebook, with arguably less of an emphasis on in-joke Twitter personalities than the DSA.

Doorknocking

VicSocialists activists strongly emphasised the importance of face-to-face work, particularly doorknocking. When asked what was required to scale up from a local government to a state level campaign, leading organiser Liz Walsh answered doorknocking first and foremost. More than 95,000 doors were knocked, with around 120 people attending doorknocking events each weekend for eight weeks. Activists express pride in hundreds of activists turning up to doorknocking, and recounted how Green and Labor activists were surprised at how many they mobilised.

A report from *Marxist Left Review* matches accounts from my interviews of successful connections:

It was common for volunteers to return from doorknocking with accounts of meeting old trade union militants keen to regale them about this or that struggle, migrants who had not forgotten their more radical traditions from their country of origin, or even young workers who responded with immediate enthusiasm when we told them our candidate was a construction worker who would only take a skilled worker's wage. These were by no means the majority of experiences, but they indicated there was a constituency to connect with.⁵

VicSocialists' success in mobilising hundreds for door-

4 Barnes, Christopher C. "Democratic Socialists on Social Media: Cohesion, Fragmentation, and Normative Strategies." *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 18 (1): 1-285, January 1 2020 (<https://tinyurl.com/set6plj>). Accessed 29/02/2020

5 Walsh, Liz. "Launching Victorian Socialists: an anti-capitalist electoral alliance." *Marxist Left Review*, published by Socialist Alternative, No 18, pp. 19-38

knocking campaigns is a success in face-to-face or 'meatspace' mobilisation, but it is also a success facilitated by digital technology. Doorknockers used an app to record which doors had been knocked, and the events were primarily promoted through Facebook. This illustrates a distinct conception from both utopian and dystopian accounts of digital media – the use of digital media as simply a tool, with pros and cons. As Kath Larkin said, "people will find ways to communicate", and digital media is one of those ways. VicSocialists activist and casual academic Daniel Lopez noted that a resident he spoke to on the doorstep in Brunswick had read an article Lopez wrote for US socialist magazine *Jacobin*, which he found on social media – indicating the way digital connections and face-to-face connections can be complementary.

Legacy media

VicSocialist activists interacted with two distinct strands of 'legacy media' in two distinct ways: with 'mainstream media' such as right-wing newspapers, and with socialist media. Unsurprisingly their engagement with 'mainstream media' was largely critical, although not necessarily dismissive. An example of oppositional reading of mainstream media is offered by Kath Larkin's account of daily engagement with newspapers as a rail worker:

One other thing at my workplace is that I clear trains that go to the yard, and people leave newspapers and so we all kind of collect newspapers and then we'll read them in the lunch room, which means we read a lot of *Herald Sun*, which is obviously a really right-wing news source, but it is useful I think to know what's being said in this newspaper, because it is so widely read.

Activists in general made an effort to engage with 'mainstream media' despite their criticisms. A number of activists spoke of a 'blackout' on coverage of the VicSocialists in mainstream media. This impression of unfavourable terrain is perhaps comparable with the perception of Facebook and Twitter as hostile corporate terrain, although those channels afforded more promotion. Of the few articles on the VicSocialists, one article participants often mentioned negatively was a *Guardian* article which appeared more sympathetic to Fiona Patten, a rival candidate who won the seat Stephen Jolly aimed for.

Although the VicSocialists do not have their own digital platform in the fashion of digital parties like the Pirate Parties, the various component socialist groups do have their own media channels. These include newspapers, journals, and websites (discounting social media channels which the groups do not own). Yet these print-centric channels are arguably 'legacy media', perhaps reflecting the fact that the sects are 'legacy organisations', groups that have weathered decades in the cold. Central activists often engaged with socialist media as creators or distributors. Yet this was not universal, with a number of activists not regularly reading the press of organisations like Socialist Alternative – more often, activists reported reading broad left publications like *Overland* and *Jacobin*, and some listened to left-leaning podcasts like Chapo

Trap House. Although a number of activists did engage with socialist media, it didn't appear to be particularly complementary with the VicSocialists campaign, with the exception of electoral propaganda on digital media channels – counterintuitively, given activists' stated skepticism about these channels. This is likely due to the relative efficiency of social media channels compared with newspapers. More recently, that is after the VicSocialists' State and Federal election campaigns, Socialist Alternative launched a podcast called Red Flag Radio, taking advantage of the wider wave of socialist podcasts such as Chapo Trap House.

If we also include snail mail, posters, yard signs and the like as 'legacy media' due to pre-existing digital media, then these forms of legacy media were perceived as decisive, unlike the socialist newspapers. Campaign organiser Liz Walsh makes this case:

The numbers of doors knocked on, letters distributed, corflute/yard signs erected, posters plastered on street poles and so on is absolutely decisive in being able to connect up with the left wing sentiment and discontent with the major parties that does exist among layers of people in Victoria.

To demonstrate this case, Walsh points to the example of the Western Metro region, which had similar demographics to Northern Metro but where the VicSocialists didn't wage a ground campaign. Here the VicSocialists received 0.57%. Therefore the ground campaign was decisive in the VicSocialists' more impressive result in Northern Metro. This arguably vindicates the VicSocialists activists' strong emphasis on doorknocking and other 'old-school' methods, without eschewing digital communication. Walsh's article, which is fairly extensive, does not mention social media either positively or negatively.

Conclusion

VicSocialist activists tend to express a strong ambivalence about social media. Activists emphasise the importance of face-to-face organisation, although in practice digital media and other forms of organisation are strongly complementary. Digital media is embedded but not fetishised, and used more for promotion than democratic participation (which largely occurs through bi-annual member conferences). The results of this study are paralleled by a study on the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), an organisation that has around 50,000 members after backing the Bernie Sanders campaign. DSA members used social media to promote socialist ideas, yet were often ambivalent about the medium. DSA members argued for collective social media pages to counter the social media tendency towards individualist fragmentation, a strategy used by the VicSocialists.

Preserving Aotearoa/NZ's radical literature

Radical Aotearoa Digital Archive (or RADAR) is a project to preserve the publications and media of the radical left in New Zealand. This archive is intended to serve as the central hub for efforts to digitise the many print publications of the radical left in New Zealand produced over the years – from the major newspapers & magazines, to individual pamphlets or leaflets, and eventually perhaps even rare books. Daphne Lawless, member of the Fightback editorial group and former editor of Socialist Worker Monthly Review and UNITY (2005-2011), was invited to give a talk to the launch of RADAR in Dunedin, New Zealand, in February 2019 – the following message was read out.

Revolutionary greetings to comrades and friends at the launch of RADAR. I would have liked to be there, but travel expenses with a wife and toddler in tow were prohibitive.

For my sins, one of the many tasks with which I have burdened myself is cataloguing and sorting the Red Kiwi Library – the books and periodicals collection of the Communist Party of New Zealand and its successor, Socialist Worker, of which I was a leading member. To some extent, for me this has been similar to sorting through the effects of a deceased relative. Nostalgia, combined with occasional delight of discovery, and sadness for what might have been.

I caught myself wondering on several occasions – is this what nearly 100 years of revolutionary socialist activism in Aotearoa/New Zealand amounts to? A hundred or so boxes of paper, much of it nothing but trash, most of the rest only of interest to sad obsessives like... well, like the people who've made it here today?

"Publishing the revolutionary paper" has been a nostrum of Lenin's school of revolutionary politics since its beginning. The idea was not only the question of getting The Truth (or, in the Russian, *pravda*) into the working class's hands, but that writing, producing, distributing and financing the paper were the "scaffolding" around which a revolutionary party might be built that would seize state power.

Far too often, though, The Paper (and revolutionary publishing in general) became not a tool for building the party; rather, the party becomes a mechanism for keeping The Paper alive, and thus giving a few committed socialist writers/editors something to do with their spare time. You've got to wonder: what is the point of a "revolutionary paper" which is funded by the revolutionaries themselves, rather than by the audience they hope to reach? The financial question is a political one.

I was part of the last major attempt at a mass socialist paper in this country, *Workers' Charter*. I personally believe it was an excellent broad-left paper. But the working masses who read it clearly did not think it was vital enough to support it financially – and we quickly ran out

of our own resources.

Clearly basing our activity around a paper publication would be woefully insufficient in the Internet era. (*Workers' Charter* didn't even have a website!) Gone are the days when we could sneer at social media and websites as "petty bourgeois", the kind of thing that REAL WORKERS don't waste their time with. Workers under 30 are digital natives. And workers over 30 are increasingly having to catch up with them. (One interesting tangent is how the online growth of conspiracy theory can be traced to people who grew up pre-Internet getting online late in life – without having developed the ability to recognize trolling, scamming and disinformation.)

To be frank, these days a Facebook post will probably reach as many workers as standing on a street corner selling a newspaper – and it takes less time, effort and expense. So is revolutionary publishing dead? Well, as I see it, it's a lot like the music industry, and not just because it seems to rely in practice on exploiting the labour of the young and enthusiastic. No, it's because it requires alternative revenue streams to function. Crowdfunding, Patreon and similar online initiatives are one possible solution to this. But there's also the issue that it's hard to get people to pay money for a non-physical good. So, the link between support for the content and *handing over some capitalist currency so it can keep being produced* needs to be re-established.

I would also say that one advantage that paper has over electrons is permanence. Electronic publications can be reproduced infinitely at no cost. But storage and bandwidth do cost, and are impermanent. On my office desk now are CPNZ publications going back to 1934. They sat in various offices for 85 years, gathering dust but otherwise intact. Can we be sure that the YouTube videos and podcasts which are now the cutting edge of leftist media outreach will even be still available in 10 years, let alone 85? The impermanence of the online medium is actually considered a benefit for people who don't want to have their teenage *Xena: Warrior Princess* fan-fiction following them around as adults. But that's the opposite of what socialist publishing needs.

Because there is another major problem in the actually existing socialist movement, and that is the *lack of continuity*. Over the last 10 years in New Zealand politics, all but one of the major revolutionary socialist groups collapsed. To make a broad summary: the “baby boom” generation who’d been carrying these organisations on their backs for 50 years were not able to continue, and the “Millennial” generation weren’t interested in carrying on in the old ways. (And there weren’t nearly enough of the in-between sort, like myself.)

New organisations and media projects have arisen. But there’s no *organisational continuity*. The “tacit knowledge” that literature on education in organisations talks about hasn’t been passed down. And most of the “explicit knowledge” contained in publications isn’t read by the younger generation. They don’t think they need it. It’s almost like 1969 again – “never trust anyone over 30” (and also, all the people who were anarchist hippies yesterday seem to be turning into Marxist-Leninists!) We seem to be re-inventing the wheel in some cases.

Which is where RADAR comes in, by at least providing some kind of permanence to electronic revolutionary publications in Aotearoa/New Zealand over the last 25 years. I hope that there will be synergy between this project and my own of making the “Red Kiwi Library” available to the movements once again. There’s a hell of a lot of dusty old polemics sitting in my office that could use scanning. Since the revolutionary groups have either collapsed or ossified, it seems to be left to us (amateur) historians and archivists to keep the ideas of the past alive.

A website of ancient blog posts, or a bunch of dusty old boxes of books, might not be a great legacy, but they are what we have. And you know what they say about people who forget the past.

The struggle continues.

About Fightback (Aotearoa/ Australasia)

Fightback is a trans-Tasman socialist media project with a magazine, a website, and other platforms. We believe that a structural analysis is vital in the task of winning a world of equality and plenty for all. Capitalism, our current socio-economic system, is not only exploiting people and planet – but is designed to operate this way. Therefore, we advocate a total break with the current system to be replaced by one designed and run collectively based on principles of freedom, mutual aid, and social need.

Fightback is a trans-Tasman organization, operating in Aotearoa and Australia. In the modern era of free movement across the Tasman, ‘Australasia’ is becoming a reality in a way it has not been since the 19th century. So many New Zealanders (tauiwi as well as tangata whenua) now live and work in Australia – and decisions made in one country increasingly impact the other, as the inter-governmental controversy surrounding the Manus Island detention camp shows.

We wish to engage socialists from both sides of the Tasman – in particular, socialists from Aotearoa living and working in Australia – to continue the lines of analysis and directions of organization which we have been pursuing. Beyond the dogmas of ‘sect Marxism’; beyond national boundaries; towards a genuinely decolonised, democratic, feminist and queer-friendly anti-capitalism.

We recognise that capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa and Australia through colonisation. While we draw substantially on European whakapapa and intellectual traditions, we seek to break the unity of the European colonial project, in favour of collective self-determination and partnership between tangata whenua and tauiwi. We recognise that this must be a learning process.

While we draw inspiration and lessons from history, theoretical agreement on past revolutions is not the basis for our unity. Rather, we unify around a common programme for transformation here and now.

Fightback's Ten-Point Programme

Fightback stands for the following core programme, and for building institutions of grassroots power in the working class and oppressed groups to bring them about:

Constitutional transformation based on indigenous self-determination and workers power. Indigenous and worker co-ops to operate as guardians over public resources.

Secure, appropriate and meaningful work for those who want it, with a shorter working week. The benefit system to be supplemented with a Universal Basic Income, removal of punitive sanctions.

International working-class solidarity. Close the Detention Centres. Open borders to Australia and Aotearoa, full rights for migrant workers. Recognise Pasefika rights to self-determination, Australia and Aotearoa to contribute to a 'no-strings' development fund for Pacific nations. Opposition to all imperialist ventures and alliances; neither Washington nor Moscow.

No revolution without women's liberation. Full funding for appropriate, community-driven abuse prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies, public responsibility for childcare and other reproductive work. The right to full, safe expression of sexuality and gender identity.

An ecosocialist solution to climate change. End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport, and radically restructure industrial food production.

Freedom of information. End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons. Public support for all media technologies, expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to government spying.

Abolish prisons, replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.

Universal right to housing. Expansion of high-density, high-quality public housing, strict price controls on privately owned houses. Targeted support to end involuntary homelessness.

Fully-funded healthcare at every level. Move towards health system based on informed consent, remove inequities in accident compensation, opposition to "top-down" efforts to change working people's behaviour.

Fully-funded education at every level, run by staff and students. Funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining indigenous knowledge as a core part of the curriculum.

For an expanded discussion of this programme, please see the pamphlet *What Is Fightback?*

Also available from

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

Pamphlets



Magazine back issues

Issue 19: Women and Gender Minorities

Issue 20: International

Issue 21: Climate Change

Issue 22: Neo-Liberalism

Issue 23: Youth

Issue 24: Pasefika

Issue 25: Electoral Politics

Issue 26: Right to the City

Issue 27: Migrant and Refugee Rights

Issue 28: Electoral Politics and Racism

Issue 29: Fascism and Anti-Fascism

Issue 30: What is Capitalism?

Issue 31: Accessibility

Issue 32: Migrants and Refugees

Issue 33: International

Issue 34: Fighting Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism

Issue 35: Syria, Revolution and Counter-Revolution

Issue 36: Socialist Feminism

Issue 37: Trade Unions for the 21st Century

All publications \$5 each + \$5 shipping and handling

(bundle of 5 publications \$15 inc. shipping and handling. All prices in NZ dollars.

Some items may no longer be available, so include contact details with order.)

Send your order to: fightback.australasia@gmail.com

Or: PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland 1642, New Zealand

